

Boko Haram

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Malari village, more than 150 kilo-metres away from Wednesday's attacks.

"The bomber was a girl aged around 15 who was seen around the mosque when worshippers were preparing for the afternoon prayers," Danlami Ajaokuta, a vigilante assisting the military against Boko Haram, told AFP.

"People asked her to leave because she had no business there and they were not comfortable with her in view of the spate of suicide attacks by female Boko Haram members."

"She made to leave but while the people were inside the mosque for the prayers she ran from a distance into the mosque and blew herself up," he added -- an account corroborated by resident Gajimi Mala.

And early Friday morning, as people were sleeping, Boko Haram militants dragged men out of houses in Miringa village and shot them for escaping forced conscription.

They "picked 13 men from selected homes and took them to the Eid prayer ground outside the village where they opened fire on them," resident Baballe Mohammed said, adding 11 died and two managed to escape.

He and another resident said the victims had been targeted because they had fled their home village after Boko Haram tried to force them to join their ranks.

The armed group has intensified its campaign of violence since Buhari came to power on May 29, launching raids, explosions and suicide attacks that have claimed more than 420 lives.

The spike in violence has sparked concern that earlier victories claimed by the armies of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon in the region are being eroded.

The four countries -- all of which border Lake Chad, a focal point of Boko Haram unrest -- launched offensives against the militants early this year as it became apparent that the armed group was gaining too much ground in Nigeria.

They managed to push the militants out of captured towns and villages, but the recent attacks highlight that Boko Haram is not defeated.

Local shoemakers

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footwear, Bay Emporium caters mainly to middle-income groups. It has plans to raise the number of outlets to a hundred by 2017 to meet the growing demand.

"After readymade garment, footwear is the country's most potential sector," said Quader.

Cheap labour here could attract foreign investment. Political stability, business-friendly environment and low bank interest rates are essential for both local and foreign investment in this sector, he added.

According to data of the Export Promotion Bureau, Bangladesh exported leather, footwear and leather products worth \$204.44 million from July to May in fiscal 2014-15. The amount was \$205.03 million during the same period in the previous year.

Abu Taher, chairman of Fortuna Bangladesh, said high bank interest rates are a barrier to expansion of footwear business, as entrepreneurs need credit to expand their networks.

"We have 18 outlets that sell footwear and leather products. We have plans to expand the network across the country. But we need credit from banks," he said, adding that the bank interest rate is around 15 percent in Bangladesh while it is only 3-4 percent in China.

Leatherex Group, which has been exporting footwear and leather products mainly to Japan since 2000, has opened five stores in the capital to provide quality products to local consumers.

The group didn't have any plan to launch new outlets ahead of the Eid, but it would open 10 showrooms by December this year, said its Chairman Nazmul Hassan.

Zeil's is another local footwear brand that has 18 stores in Dhaka, Chittagong, Tangail, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and other parts of the country.

It plans to open another outlet in Bogra before the Eid, said an official at the company's Farmgate outlet.

The prices of Zeil's footwear range between Tk 250 and Tk 3,990, said the official.

Multinational company Bata, which started operation in Bangladesh in 1962, has the largest footwear retail network here with 270 outlets and over 500 dealers.

Apex Footwear, the second largest footwear retailer in the country, has 180 outlets and 380 authorised resellers.

Rajan Pillai, chief operating officer of Apex, said they launched 10 more showrooms across the country in the last two months. "We also plan to open three more outlets before the Eid."

Our two families in the mean time paid Kalam's wife Tk 2.5 lakh for each

India's push to save its cows starves

Bangladesh of beef

REUTERS, Ghojadanga

Some 30,000 Indian soldiers guarding the border with Bangladesh have a new mandate under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government this year to stop cattle from crossing illegally into the Muslim-majority neighbour.

Roughly every other night, troops armed with bamboo sticks and ropes wade through jute and paddy fields and swim across ponds to chase ageing bovines, and smugglers, headed for markets in Bangladesh.

The crackdown is one of the clearest signs yet of how Indian policies, increasingly influenced by Hindu nationalist ideology, are having an economic impact on neighbouring countries as well as the sizeable Muslim minority at home.

About 2 million head of cattle are smuggled into Bangladesh annually from India. The \$600 million-a-year trade has flourished over the past four decades and is considered legal by Dhaka.

Modi's government, which came to power with the help of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), wants to put an end to it.

Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh travelled this spring to the frontier with Bangladesh, calling on the Border Security Force (BSF) to halt cattle smuggling completely so that the "people of Bangladesh give up eating beef", media reported at the time.

"Killing or smuggling a cow is equivalent to raping a Hindu girl or destroying a Hindu temple," said Jishnu Basu, an RSS spokesman in West Bengal, which shares a 2,216 km border with Bangladesh.

BEEF PRICES UP, EXPORTS DOWN
So far this year, BSF soldiers have seized 90,000 cattle and caught 400 Indian and Bangladeshi smugglers.

Bangladeshi traders who operate auctions to facilitate the sale of cattle to slaughter houses, beef processing units, tanneries and bone crushing factories estimate the industry contributed 3 percent to the country's \$190

billion economy.

The hit to GDP from India's policies is not yet known. But H T Imam, a political adviser to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, said there was "absolutely no doubt" that the beef trade and leather industry were suffering.

Syed Hasan Habib of Bengal Meat, Bangladesh's top beef exporter, said it had to cut international orders by 75 percent. The company exports 125 tonnes of beef a year to Gulf countries.

He said the price of cows had gone up by 40 percent over the past six months because of India's move, and they had been forced to close two processing units.

Habib plans to import cows from Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar to meet domestic demand, but he said Indian cows had better quality meat and raw hide.

Bangladesh Tanners Association president Shaheen Ahmed said 30 of 190 tanneries had suspended work due to lack of hides, and about 4,000 workers were jobless.

A senior official in India's home ministry said Bangladesh should find new sources of beef because India would stick to its stance.

COW PROTECTION FORCE

India is home to 300 million cattle and is the world's largest beef exporter and fifth-biggest consumer.

But since Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is closely linked to the RSS, came to power last year, the rhetoric on cow protection and the beef ban has increased.

Critics say tougher anti-beef laws discriminate against Muslims, Christians and lower-caste Hindus who rely on the cheap meat for protein. Butchers and cattle traders, many of them Muslim, say the push threatens thousands of jobs.

The rhetoric has also emboldened vigilante cow protectors.

"I was chained to a tree and beaten by members of the cow protection force. They forced me to recite a Hindu prayer," said Mohammed Tarafdar, who was caught smuggling two calves near the Bangladesh border in April.

Barisal police

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about the matter two months back.

But Shoyeb, also deputy commissioner of Barisal Metropolitan Police (BMP), did not take any action over the allegation, the commissioner said.

He also failed to submit the probe report within the scheduled time, Shoibal added.

The newly formed five-member committee will be headed by BMP deputy commissioner (traffic) Abu Saleh Md Raihan.

BMP assistant commissioners Shahnaz Parvin, Runa Laila, Asaduzzaman and Apu Sarwar are the other members of the committee that has been tasked to submit its report within three working days.

A total of 230 Barisal police members contributed between Tk 30,000 and Tk 50,000 each and set up a joint

fund of around Tk 77 lakh.

The money was to be given to "top officials" to quicken their promotion that has been due since last October.

Of the money, Tk 17 lakh was deposited with a joint account of ASI Anisuzzaman, Nayek Kabir Hossain and driver Bablu at a Dutch-Bangla Bank branch in Barisal.

The three are among the suspended cops.

BMP Deputy Commissioner Zillur Rahman, who was also suspended over his involvement in the creation of the fund, returned Tk 50 lakh on Thursday.

He submitted two cheques of Tk 25 lakh each to the BMP headquarters, the BMP commissioner said.

On June 29, 10 lower-ranked Barisal policemen were suspended over the allegation.

Back home after 6-month

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Within a few days, around 40 others from across the country joined them. On December 15, they were taken to the Bay of Bengal by a small fishing boat.

"Our perilous journey by the sea began. In the first few days, we only got some rice and green chillies to eat. Later, we were given some puffed rice. If anybody wanted something more, they were beaten up brutally," added the victim.

After spending three weeks in the sea, they were boarded on a big ship on January 9. Around 900 others were in the vessel.

The traffickers, mostly from Bangladesh and Myanmar, forced one of the fortune seekers to slit open the abdomen of his own brother who died on board, said Shohag. "The man had to do it and throw away the body into the sea just to save his own life."

Four women and two men died on board due to hunger and torture.

By the end of February, the vessel anchored near an island. The brokers then divided the victims in several groups and took them into a jungle.

The two cousins tried to flee from the jungle, but in vain. They were caught by guards.

Shohag couldn't contact his family for around three months. He requested a trafficker to help him call his mother. "The traffickers would not give me the chance. They only allowed me to talk to Kalam. I sought his help to end the captivity."

On March 5, Kalam arranged his journey to Malaysia upon assurance that he would pay the broker the money.

Our two families in the mean time paid Kalam's wife Tk 2.5 lakh for each

of us in phases," said Shohag.

He was quite happy to reach Malaysia. But soon he observed that he was in captivity of a new group of traffickers.

Traffickers started torturing Shohag for ransom. They had cigarettes stubbed out on his face and back.

After failing to get the ransom, the traffickers forced Shohag to work as a painter. Around two months later, he met his neighbour Titu Hossain who has been in Malaysia for long.

"After hearing about my ordeal, he arranged my trip to home. I called my mother and asked her to send money for buying an air ticket," Shohag mentioned.

On May 27, he went to Jhenidah Sadar Police Station to file a case against Kalam. But police asked him to go to a local court.

Jahir Uddin, officer-in-charge (investigation) at the police station, said they asked the victim to file the case with a court to make its investigation easier.

Shohag on June 9 sued Kalam in a Jhenidah court for his six-month ordeal and financial losses. He claimed that Kalam was in his village.

He demanded that law enforcers arrest the accused and ensure his exemplary punishment.

Despite repeated efforts, this newspaper could not reach Kalam over the phone for his comment.

According to the National Security Intelligence, 40 trafficking victims from Shailakupa upazila, 35 from Harinakundu, 15 from Kaliganj, six from Maheshpur and four from Courtchandpur upazilas of Jhenidah have been missing for around seven months.

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Two journalists killed in Mexico

AFP, Oaxaca

A journalist was shot dead as he left his radio station in southern Mexico on Thursday while a second reporter was murdered in an eastern state, officials said.

Filadelfo Sanchez Sarmiento was heading out following his morning radio show at the La Favorita 103.3 FM station when two men gunned him down in Miahuatlán, southern Oaxaca state, prosecutors said.

Authorities launched an operation to catch the two suspects.

"Mexican authorities must thoroughly investigate this killing and establish a motive -- including any possible connection to journalism -- and bring those responsible to justice," said Carlos Lauria, senior Americas program director of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

"This crime must not become one of the dozens of unsolved journalist murders in Mexico, which has one of the worst impunity rates in the world," Lauria said.

He was the third journalist to be killed in Oaxaca since April.

Separately, a blogger was murdered in the eastern state of Veracruz, but there were no details about how he died.

The State Commission for the Protection and Attention of Journalists, a government body, said the death of Juan Mendoza Delgado, who was found dead on Wednesday, was declared a "homicide."

Mendoza Delgado was director of a website called "Writing the Truth" and a former crime reporter at a local newspaper.

Then there's competition from

Weavers in distress

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experience at the market, locally known as Taant Kaporer Haat, that sits twice a week.

Motaleb Hossain weaved 40 saris but could sell only 10.

"I took loans to keep my 10 looms in full operation targeting the Eid season. Now I cannot even recover my production cost. How will I be able to repay the loans?" the marginal weaver, also from Pukurpar, said.

With around five lakh active weavers, Pabna and Sirajganj districts have the biggest handloom clothes producing zone in the country. Retailers, wholesalers and individual customers from across the country pour in at the Shahjadpur haat all around the year, especially ahead of every Eid.

"On a normal haat day, weavers here sell clothes worth around Tk 200 core but the sales shot up significantly from at least a month before the Eid," Almas Ansari, president of Shahjadpur Handloom Owners' Association, told The Daily Star.

"This season, we had set our sales target to Tk 4,000 crore. However, due to a poor turnout of customers, our weavers in the last 10 haat days managed to sell clothes worth Tk 1,800-2,000 crore, the poorest in the last few years," he added.

KEY REASONS

Weavers, traders and wholesalers of the area identify three major reasons behind the drop in the sales of handloom clothes.

"First, the economic condition of the rural people is dire. They could not profit from Boro rice and wheat yields. They are finding it difficult to manage their daily expenses even. How can they buy clothes?" said Shahin Alam, a weaver of Shahjadpur.

Then there's competition from

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machine-made clothes which sell cheaper than the ones weaved in handlooms, said weaver Nazrul Islam of Pabna's Jalalpur.

"Despite these, the situation could be much better than it is now if we, instead of relying on local buyers only, could export the handloom clothes," Almas Ansari told The Daily Star.

HOPES STILL ON

Despite a dismal sales trend, the weavers in Pabna and Sirajganj are passing a busy time at their looms.

"At least four lakh looms out of five lakh are in operation at the moment. Despite disappointing sales, the weavers here hope to see a last minute surge in business ahead of the Eid," said Md Badsha, member of Bangladesh Handloom and Power Loom Owners' Association.

Md Waliullah, a marginal weaver with two looms at his house, has borrowed money from other to keep the production on.

"I cannot